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Teachers' Attitudes Toward the Inclusion of Students with Autism and Emotional

Behavioral Disorder

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Abstract

General education teachers have differing views about the inclusion of students with disabilities in mainstream classrooms. However, the type and severity of the children's disabilities affect teachers' willingness to accommodate certain students and their confidence that they will effectively manage their classroom. It has been reported that teachers have expressed concerns about having students with autism and emotional behavioral disorder in the general education setting because of the children's lack of social skills, behavioral outbursts, modifications made to the curriculum, and lack of training and supports. Many instructors do not believe they are able to teach these populations effectively while simultaneously teaching a large group of typically developing students. Teachers' attitudes toward their current student population with special needs dramatically affect the success and effectiveness of their instruction. Using a snowball sampling method, 25 general education teachers were surveyed regarding their willingness to include a child with autism and a student with EBD in their classroom to determine if there was a significant difference in their attitudes toward the disabilities. An independent sample t-test was used to compare the mean scores of the data in addition to a descriptive statistics method to examine the ranges of the two groups. Results suggest that the presence of typical characteristics of the two disabilities influence teachers' willingness to have the populations in their classrooms. The significant difference in mean scores suggests that the participants were more

accepting of having a student with autism in their general education classrooms than a student who has EBD.

## Teachers' Attitudes Toward the Inclusion of Students with Autism and Emotional Behavioral Disorder

Does a student's disability affect the way in which they are welcomed in the classroom? In recent years, there has been a significant movement of children with special education needs away from segregated settings and into general education classrooms (Avramidis, Bayliss, & Burden, 2000, p. 277). This movement is due in large part to the Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act of 2004. This law was passed to ensure that diverse and exceptional learners in the United States were given a free and appropriate public education that met their needs in the least restrictive environment (IDEIA, United States Department of Education, 2004). Avramidis et al. define inclusion as "restructuring educational provision to promote belonging, i.e. all pupils in a school see themselves as belonging to a community, including those with significant disabilities" (p. 278). However, the effectiveness of inclusion may be influenced by the attitudes of the school personnel who are directly involved. Lopes, Monteiro, and Sil (1994) found that the majority of teachers are not fully receptive to inclusion because they do not know how to differentiate instruction or what kind of support to provide to the children with disabilities (p. 413). Soodak, Powell, and Lehman (1998) report, "Teachers' attitudes toward integration appear to vary with their perceptions of the specific disability as well as their beliefs about the demands that students' instructional and management needs will place on them" (p. 481). The fact that school personnel may treat individuals differently based on their diagnosis implies that their attitudes toward inclusion should be further explored.

It is important to identify teachers' attitudes toward inclusion because it can dramatically affect their performance and the success of children with disabilities in the classroom. According to Avramidis

et al. (2000), "Professionals' attitudes may act to facilitate or constrain the implementation of policies... the success of innovative and challenging programs must surely depend upon the cooperation and commitment of those most directly involved" (p. 278). Soodak, Podell, and Lehman supports this finding, reporting, "Teachers who embraced the responsibility to be inclusive have also elevated the quality of instruction, and the instruction was deemed more effective than that of teachers who had dissimilar beliefs concerning inclusion" (as cited in Ryan, 2009, p. 181). Their conclusion indicates that an increased receptivity toward including students with special needs is associated to greater teacher efficacy, higher rates of teacher collaboration, and an increased likelihood to differentiate instruction. Therefore, negative views of inclusion will influence interactions with children who have disabilities (Ryan, 2009, p. 185). Avramidis et al. found that those who do not fully agree with inclusion are less likely to individualize lesson plans according to students' needs and are less confident that they can implement the requirements of individualized education plans (p. 289). When general education teachers have negative attitudes toward inclusion and are unwilling to have students with disabilities in their classroom, they may not provide the necessary supports that would create a beneficial learning environment for the students.

Many factors may affect educational professionals' attitudes toward the inclusion of students with disabilities including the level of confidence they have to teach the children, the support they are receiving, and opportunities for collaboration. Avramidis et al. (2000) report:

Regular teachers' attitudes reflected lack of confidence in their own instructional skills and quality of support personnel available to them. They were positive about integrating only those whose disabling characteristics were not likely to require extra instructional or management skills from the teacher (p. 279).

The apprehension they may feel, whether it is due to lack of experience or an overall skepticism of the idea of inclusion will affect the efficacy of the teachers. Ross-Hill (2009) explains that not offering frequent and substantial training brings about “tension, stress, and strain for both teachers and students alike in inclusive settings” (p. 189). Therefore, providing teachers with support will improve the overall implementation of inclusion, making it more beneficial for the students. The support given by the principal, based on their beliefs about the importance of including children with disabilities, strongly dictates the general educators’ teaching methods and behavior (p. 281). Soodak et al. (1998) state, “Teachers are more willing to accommodate students in their classrooms when they perceive that their school administration fosters a supportive climate and when the culture of the school encourages teaming and collaboration (p. 483). Adequate support from administrators is likely to increase teachers’ likelihood of collaborating with special educators in order to solve problems in the inclusive classroom (Ross-Hill, p. 191). It is likely that these partnerships and support systems increase overall acceptance of inclusion, compensate for any insecurities, and improve educational professionals’ attitudes towards having students with a variety of disabilities in the general education classroom (Soodak et al., p. 493).

Research has found that the nature and type of the disability can influence teachers’ attitudes towards inclusion (Ryan, 2009, p.185). Avramidis et al. (2000) explain, “Multiple interpretations of labels occurs when teachers attribute different characteristics to a label based on their experience which could be positive or negative” (p. 282). It was discovered that the nature and severity of the disabilities in the study and the perceived stress that would be put on the teacher significantly influenced the educators’ opinions toward including the students with special needs in the classroom (p. 289). According to Lopes et al. (2004), students with special needs “present serious challenges to teachers because they are difficult, time-consuming, and frustrating” (p. 413). Children with autism and emotional behavioral disorders generally exhibit different behaviors in the classroom than their typically

developing peers and require individualized attention from professionals. Therefore, teachers' attitudes regarding the inclusion of these students will be explored.

Past research regarding the attitudes of educational professionals toward inclusion has been contradictory and inconclusive. Teachers have reported both positive attitudes toward the inclusion as well as strong negative feelings about having students with various disabilities in the general education classroom (Avramidis et al., 2000, p. 288). However, existing research has primarily focused on teachers' perspectives of the general idea of inclusion. It is unclear from previous studies whether or not teachers have differing opinions toward the inclusion of students with autism and emotional behavioral disorders. The need further exists to better understand educational professionals' attitudes in order to determine the acceptance these students have in general education classrooms.

Professionals' attitudes toward the inclusion of students with autism and emotional behavioral disorders will be examined using a quantitative approach. The results will be beneficial to numerous individuals, including those directly involved with the inclusion process. This study may help general educators identify any biases they have toward specific disabilities that may affect the manner in which they interact with certain students. This realization may guide them to seek additional information about how to effectively include these students. Special educators may also recognize that they need to offer more support to the general education teachers when they are teaching students with certain disabilities. The information this study will provide will help educational professionals to identify their general attitudes toward the inclusion of specific students, which will hopefully result in more effective and appropriate inclusive practices.

### Literature Review

Because the inclusion of students with disabilities is enforced in a growing number of schools in the United States, it is important to evaluate the viewpoints of those who are directly involved. Several

studies have been conducted to assess general education teachers' attitudes toward inclusion and how their opinions affect the successful implementation of the process. According to Avramidis et al. (2000), "One of the main barriers to the implementation of integrating students with significant disabilities has been identified as teachers' attitudes" (p. 278). The negative attitudes toward accommodating students with special needs in mainstream classrooms are a consequence of a variety of factors. Many teachers feel that they are not prepared to meet the needs of students with special needs. Teachers may see the child as a burden on the classroom, a student who decreases the effectiveness they have when instructing the rest of the typically developing students. Teachers have reported feelings of frustration and guilt due to the time that is taken away from the majority of the students in order to accommodate the needs of one student with special needs. The inordinate amount of time needed to attend additional meetings, complete paperwork, and collaborate with specialists is seen as unfair in comparison to the time devoted to the other students in the class (Horne & Farrell, 2009, p. 280). Despite these difficulties teachers experienced, educators have also reported the benefits of inclusion. Bunch and Finnegan describe teachers' experiences of positive effects on the social development of both the students with special needs and those who are typically developing. They found "peer interaction through modeling and simple physical proximity appeared to increase self-esteem for all students and promote a sense of belonging for students with learning needs" (as cited in Horne & Farrell, p. 274). It is unknown if the benefits of inclusion outweigh the stress it can place on a teacher and their students because each classroom is filled with unique individuals.

Obviously, there are pros and cons associated with the inclusion of students with disabilities. Teachers have observed and experienced both the benefits and negative consequences the process has on the classroom as a whole. However, the type of disability and the nature of the behaviors manifested by it may sway teachers' overall attitudes in a positive or negative way (Avramidis et al. 2000, p. 278). The actions and behaviors of students with autism and emotional behavioral disorders

are typically different from those exhibited by typically developing children. Consequently, the attitudes toward these two populations of students affect the quality of the inclusive experience.

**Autism.** The inclusion of children with autism can be advantageous for all students if it is done in an appropriate manner with adequate professional support. IDEIA was passed to ensure that students with autism were included with their typically developing peers as much as possible (IDEIA, United States Department of Education, 2004). According to McGregor and Campbell (2001):

Integration of children with autism has two clear goals. The first is to honor the right of all members of a community to take full part in its day-to-day life. The second goal is to improve the quality of children's social interaction and academic development through daily contact with typically developing peers (p. 190).

This is to allow them to participate in their society while they advance their academic and social skills. Inclusion gives students with autism the opportunity to look at their typically developing peers as role models. The children with disabilities can emulate their peers' behavior and follow their lead in order to complete tasks in a more socially acceptable manner. However, these goals are sometimes hard to attain given the challenges manifested by the disability.

The characteristics that are associated with autism make it difficult for teachers to successfully include students with the disability in their mainstream classroom. Many children with autism have relatively high mental capacities that enable them to do a variety of activities both inside and outside the school setting. Jordan states that despite this population's intellectual capability, "These children retain most of the ASD-related impairments, including impairment in social interaction, deviant or bizarre communication, and persistent patterns of restricted and stereotyped behavior throughout their lives" (as cited in Emam & Farrell, 2009, p. 407). The unusual behavior exhibited by these children may interfere with the positive relationships they have with others, making the socialization hard to attain. In particular, the hyperactivity/impulsivity and opposition/defiance were rated as having highly



conflictual effects in the classroom (Robertson, Chamberlain, & Kasari, 2003, p. 128). These behaviors are detrimental in an inclusive classroom because they may cause frequent disruptions and distractions, which decreases learning time and restricts their opportunities for participation to school activities and affect their relationships with teachers and peers. (Emam & Farrell, p. 408).

Social constraints of students with autism may have negative effects on their relationships with others. Baron-Cohen reports that individuals with autism “have difficulties in social understanding owing to theory of mind problems, i.e. the ability to attribute mental states such as beliefs, feelings, and desires to oneself and others” (as cited by Emam & Farrell, 2009, p. 408). Theory of mind includes recognizing nonverbal communication and facial expressions as well as the ability to expect certain emotions given a specific context. Incomprehension is responsible for the inability to convey appropriate messages, which is detrimental to the interactions and relationships with others (p. 413). The lack of emotional understanding typically results in the students behaving in inappropriate ways or not being sensitive to the feelings and needs of those around them. The teacher-pupil relationship then lacks shared moments that are commonly results of making jokes and relating to one another. A child with autism’s “inability to take the perspective of teachers creates a gap between them . . . As a result, teachers learn to distance themselves in the same way as the pupils do” (p. 412). The effects of autism substantially impact the daily interactions of the child and those around them.

Teachers especially experience increased tension when trying to include this population of students in their classroom. Implicit tensions arise from the educators’ beliefs that they are unable to address the individual’s needs and simultaneously teach the remaining students. Instructors experience explicit tension due to the frustration from the manifestations autism has in their classroom. The significant stress that is continuously present affects the teacher’s acceptance of the student with autism and the desire to include them (p. 411). McGregor and Campbell (2001) found that the unpredictable nature of young children with autism has the potential to cause extreme confusion and

distress with general education teachers. Consequently, educators must reorganize their class structure as well as their teaching methods in order to promote the acquisition and generalization of knowledge (p. 202). Because autism is such a complex disability, it is hard for teachers to make generalizations regarding the best and most effective ways to teach the population. It is necessary to explore teachers' opinions toward students with this condition because their attitudes greatly affect their relationship with the students as well as the overall quality of instruction.

**Emotional behavioral disorder.** The number of students with emotional behavioral disorder who are being served in the general education setting is increasing rapidly (Niesyn, 2009, p. 227). The influx of this student population has impacted teachers' attitudes toward instructing in an inclusive setting. They are faced with additional challenges in regards to disruptive behavior that they may not be prepared to manage. The behavioral manifestations of EBD have the potential to dramatically affect the overall atmosphere of the classroom. Abrams (2005) reports that students with emotional behavioral disorders are frequently verbally and physically aggressive, hyperactive, and oppositional. They can also exhibit depression, restlessness, poor impulse control, frustration, and a lack of self-control (p. 40). Kutash and Duchnowski (2004) found that this population of students is behind in cognitive and academic functioning and has a tendency to score lower on standardized tests than their typically developing peers (p. 245). In addition to limited academic skills, students with EBD are ostracized and rejected from the peers (Heflin & Bullock, 1999, p. 106). This is often a direct result from the negative behaviors they exhibit both inside and outside the classroom. The compilation of academic and social failures oftentimes produces low levels of motivation and an overall negative opinion toward school (Abrams, p. 40). The teachers are forced to deal with the lack of effort and consequences of the disorder in addition to their responsibilities toward the other children.

Due to the academic, social, and behavioral needs of students with EBD, a high degree of support is required from skilled professionals (Heflin & Bullock, 1999, p. 104). In many cases of inclusive

settings, this responsibility falls on the general education teacher, who may or may not be adequately equipped or prepared to manage the task. General education teachers feel overwhelmed by having to try new teaching strategies and behavior management techniques when serving students with EBD. It is difficult for them to find the time to make curricular modifications while simultaneously planning lessons for the typically developing students. Other problems the teachers encounter in addition to their overwhelming workloads are insufficient support and training (p. 106). Niesyn (2009) found that traditional teacher education training primarily focuses on “preparing teachers to work with groups of students across content domains with less attention given to individual differences or special needs” (p. 227). Therefore, many teachers may be unprepared to work with students who have EBD as well as being unaware of effective instructional or classroom management skills (Abrams, 2005, p. 41). In addition to the stress of accommodating unconventional needs, Center and Steventon (2001) reported that general education teachers are also concerned with meetings and paperwork that are required from professionals who teach students with special needs. They feel that parents and administrators have unrealistic expectations when it comes to both the quantity and quality of the work that accompanies the undertaking of having children with EBD in the classroom (p. 333). The abundance of pressures and difficulties general education teachers face influences their daily encounters with their students.

Teachers’ relationships with their students who have emotional behavioral disorder significantly impact their overall attitudes toward including the children in the classroom. Avramidis et al. (2000) discovered that teachers identified students with EBD as being the most difficult to serve and cause the most stress in the mainstream classroom (p. 279). Teachers tend to react to the behavioral and social deficits of this population of students with anger and frustration. Instead of understanding that the behavior is due to a diagnosed disorder, many educators immediately resort to punishment. As a result, students feel rejected and learn to distrust the adults and have negative expectations of their teachers

and of themselves. This becomes a cycle in the classroom and causes low levels of motivation from both the instructors and the students (Abrams, 2005, p. 41). Soodak et al. (1998) found that teachers had the most negative attitudes about inclusion of students with behavioral disorders (p. 483). This affects the interactions between the adult and child on a daily basis. Robertson et al. (2003) found that teachers have closer relationships and experience less conflicts with children who have fewer behavioral problems. Their research suggests "Children who have warm, close, and communicative relationships with their teachers are considered better adjusted and have better subsequent relationships with teachers and with peers" (p. 124). Because many teachers fear their own teaching and management capabilities with students with EBD, they experience negative attitudes toward welcoming them into the classroom and less likely to form close bonds (Soodak et al, p. 483). Teachers are anxious that the required instruction and adaptations are not feasible in the mainstream classroom. The expected challenges make it difficult for general educators to accept students with EBD (Niesyn, 2009, p. 228). Because acceptance helps when dealing with stress and managing difficult situations, it is important to examine teachers' attitudes toward students with special needs such as EBD.

### **Significance of the Study**

Numerous studies have been completed that explore the characteristics of students with autism and emotional behavioral disorders as well as teachers' opinions toward including them in the general education classroom. However, further research must be done to compare instructors' attitudes of the two populations directly. The study is significant due to the fact that educators' opinions toward inclusion affect the relationships and supports that are provided in the classroom. The results of the study are significant because if general education teachers have negative attitudes toward inclusion and are unwilling to have students with disabilities in their classroom, they may not provide the necessary supports that would create a beneficial learning environment for the students. The presented

information will help general educators identify their attitudes toward the inclusion of specific students, which will hopefully result in more effective and appropriate inclusive practices.

### **Research Question**

The objective of the following study is to compare the willingness of teachers to have students with autism and emotional behavioral disorders in the general education classroom. The purpose is to answer the question: Do general education teachers have differing attitudes toward including students with autism and emotional behavioral disorder?

## **Methodology**

### **Participant Selection and Demographics**

Participants included twenty-five general education teachers that have had previous experience with students with special needs or will have the opportunity to work with them in the future. The surveyed teachers live in various states in the United States, including: Ohio, Kentucky, Massachusetts, Pennsylvania, and New York. Participants included both males and females whose ages ranged from twenty to sixty years. The participants have had between one and forty years of teaching experience.

### **Instrument**

Data was collected using a brief survey that was created by the researcher. Participants read two profiles about students with special needs and completed surveys about each child. One profile included the characteristics commonly associated with autism and the other stated those associated with emotional behavioral disorders. The surveys were five-point Likert scales that assessed the level to which the participants agreed or disagreed with a statement about the inclusion of that student.

**Survey questions.** The survey consisted of 15 statements that assessed the participants' opinions about the benefits of including a student with special needs, concerns or anxieties when teaching the student with a disability, and beliefs about how their attitudes affect the inclusion process. Participants were asked to rate their level of agreement with the following statements:

- It would be academically advantageous for this student to be in the general education setting.
- It would be academically advantageous for the typically developing students to have this student in the general education setting.
- This student should be fully included in the general education setting.
- Where possible, this student should be included in the general education setting.
- This student would be socially accepted by the other students in the class.
- I would feel confident teaching this student in my classroom.
- I would be able to adapt my lessons to meet the needs of this student.
- I would feel confident implementing and meeting the requirements indicated in this student's IEP.
- I would have the time to make adaptations, go to IEP meetings, and collaborate with other professionals for this student.
- I feel confident collaborating with colleagues to provide coherent reaching programs for students.
- I feel confident teaching typically developing students without a special educator present for this student.
- I would participate in training in order to meet the needs of this student.
- Support and training to meet the needs of this student is available and easily accessible.
- Successful integration is dependent on my attitude toward that student.
- I would have an overall positive attitude including this student in my classroom.

#### **Procedure for Gathering Data and Informed Consent**

Participants were recruited using snowball sampling. The researcher asked participants to complete the surveys and identify others to become members of the sample. There are no gatekeepers to this population given the method of recruitment. All participants were given informed consent prior

to completing the surveys. They understood the purpose and any risks that were associated with the study. They were also advised of the benefits of participating in the study and that the information they provided about the attitudes of including students with autism and emotional behavioral disorders will benefit the teaching community. They understood that they were free to withdraw at any time and that refusal to participate would have no effect on future services from the involved university. They were told that their names would not be associated with the research findings in any way, their identity will remain anonymous, and the answers they gave could not be linked to the participant. The consent stated that the data would be stored in a secure location so that only the researcher will have access and the data will be destroyed shortly after the completion of the research study. Finally, they were given the contact information of the researcher if they have any questions or concerns.

### **Analysis**

#### **Rationale for Analysis**

An independent samples t-test was used to compare the mean scores of the participants' responses regarding the inclusion of a student with autism and a student with EBD. This test was used to determine whether there is a statistically significant difference in the mean scores for the two groups. The data for Marco, the student with autism, were recorded in Group 1 and the data for Dylan, the student with EBD, were recorded in Group 2. The results were also evaluated using a descriptive statistics method. The frequencies of the scores will be analyzed in order to compare the ranges of Group 1 with Group 2.

**Results****Group Statistics**

Group	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Score 1	25	55.08	9.543	1.909
2	25	49.48	10.465	2.093

**Independent Samples Test**

	Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means			
	F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference
m Equal variances assumed	.589	.446	1.977	48	.054	5.600
Equal variances not assumed			1.977	47.598	.054	5.600

**Independent Samples Test**

		t-test for Equality of Means		
		Std. Error Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
			Lower	Upper
m	Equal variances assumed	2.833	-.095	11.295
	Equal variances not assumed	2.833	-.097	11.297

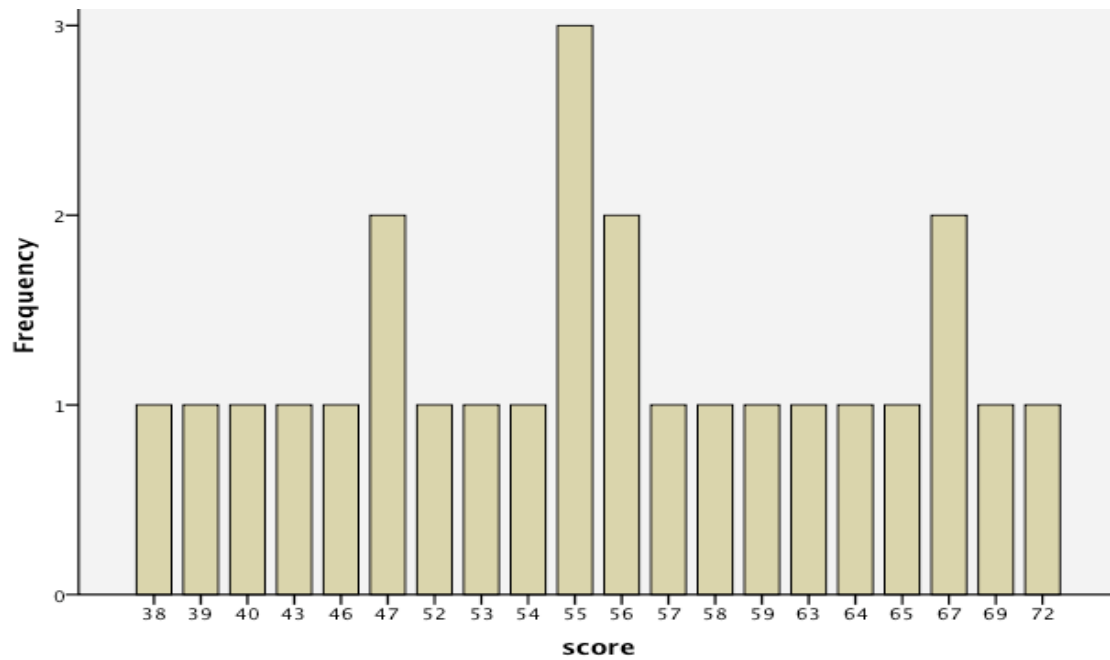


An independent-samples t-test was conducted to compare the acceptance scores of children with autism and EBD in regular education classrooms. There was a significant difference in scores regarding children with autism ( $M = 55.08$ ,  $SD = 9.543$ ) and children with EBD,  $M = 49.48$ ,  $SD = 10.465$ ;  $t(48) = 1.977$ ,  $p = .054$  (two-tailed). The magnitude of the difference in the means (mean difference = 5.600, 95% CI: -.095 to 11.295 was moderate (eta squared = .075).

The following table shows the frequency of the total scores of the 15 statements regarding Marco, the student with autism:

Autism Scores					
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	38	1	4.0	4.0	4.0
	39	1	4.0	4.0	8.0
	40	1	4.0	4.0	12.0
	43	1	4.0	4.0	16.0
	46	1	4.0	4.0	20.0
	47	2	8.0	8.0	28.0
	52	1	4.0	4.0	32.0
	53	1	4.0	4.0	36.0
	54	1	4.0	4.0	40.0
	55	3	12.0	12.0	52.0
	56	2	8.0	8.0	60.0
	57	1	4.0	4.0	64.0
	58	1	4.0	4.0	68.0
	59	1	4.0	4.0	72.0
	63	1	4.0	4.0	76.0
	64	1	4.0	4.0	80.0
	65	1	4.0	4.0	84.0
	67	2	8.0	8.0	92.0
	69	1	4.0	4.0	96.0
	72	1	4.0	4.0	100.0
Total		25	100.0	100.0	

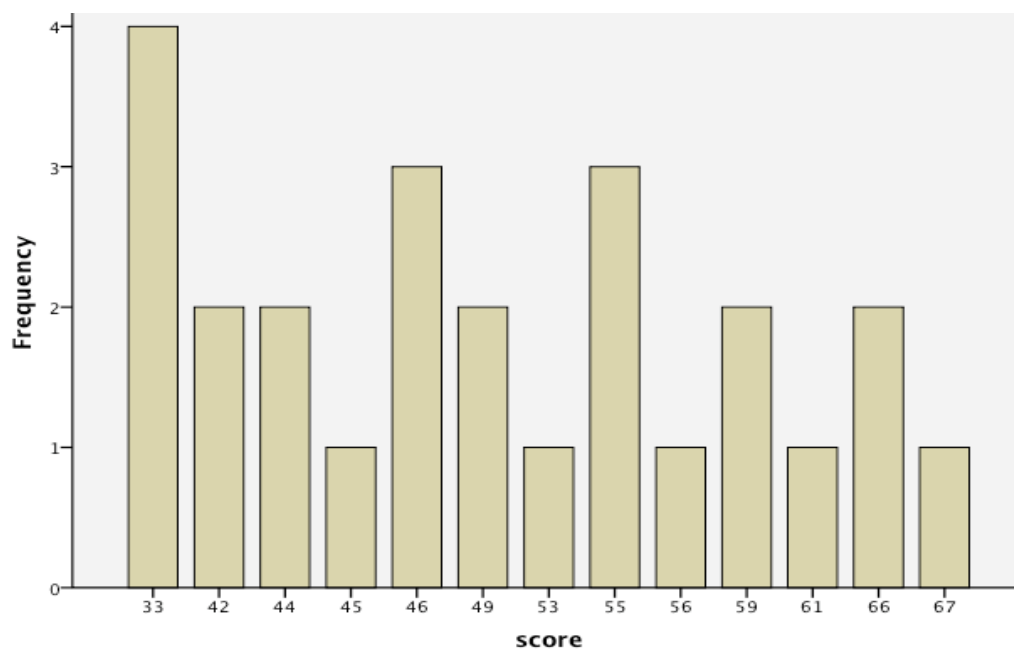
The following graph represents the frequency of the total scores for Marco:



The following table shows the frequency of the total scores of the 15 statements regarding Dylan, the student with EBD:

EBD Scores					
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	33	4	8.0	16.0	16.0
	42	2	4.0	8.0	24.0
	44	2	4.0	8.0	32.0
	45	1	2.0	4.0	36.0
	46	3	6.0	12.0	48.0
	49	2	4.0	8.0	56.0
	53	1	2.0	4.0	60.0
	55	3	6.0	12.0	72.0
	56	1	2.0	4.0	76.0
	59	2	4.0	8.0	84.0
	61	1	2.0	4.0	88.0
	66	2	4.0	8.0	96.0
	67	1	2.0	4.0	100.0
	Total	25	50.0	100.0	
	Missing System	25	50.0		
Total	50	100.0			

The following graph represents the frequency of the total scores for Dylan:



## **Summary - Conclusions and Recommendations**

### **Summary of Research Findings**

The results of the study contribute to an understanding of general education teachers' attitudes toward the inclusion of children with autism and emotional behavior disorder. The findings suggest that the presence of typical characteristics of the two disabilities influence teachers' willingness to have the populations in their classrooms. In general, the participants' felt that it would be more advantageous to have the child with autism be included in their regular education classroom than the child with EBD. They also expressed a larger amount of confidence implementing the Individual Education Plans, adapting lessons according to the students' needs, and collaborating with colleagues to create appropriate programs and accommodations for children with autism. The general education teachers would execute these required actions to a more appropriate degree for students with autism.

In addition to the evidence from the t-test, the descriptive statistics method also showed that Marco, the student with autism, was favored over Dylan. The sum of the participants' responses for Marco ranged from 38 to 72. In contrast, the sum of the participants' responses for Dylan ranged from 33 to 67. This indicates that the general education teachers were more accepting of having a student with autistic characteristics in their classrooms than those associated with students who have emotional behavioral disorder. The results suggest that participants would prefer to have a student who does not understand nonverbal behavior or humor, avoids eye contact, and becomes upset when the daily routines are changed over a student who ignores undesirable requests, argues with others, and refuses to complete assignments. The participants are more confident teaching children with autism in an inclusive setting and would be more willing to provide the necessary supports that would create a beneficial learning environment for the students.

### **Application/Agreement to Field of Special Education**

Because there have been few studies directly comparing teachers' attitudes toward including students with autism and those with EBD, the results of this study contribute to the research of special education. Professionals must examine the results and discover strategies to increase the willingness of general education teachers to have students with autism and emotional behavioral disorder in their classroom. This may mean more preparation and practice teaching students with disabilities at the college and university level. Schools may also want to offer additional and mandatory training programs specifically regarding how to accommodate the special needs of these populations of students. Teachers may become more knowledgeable about the best practices to promote their academic, social, and behavioral skills. As a result, regular education teachers would be more confident dealing with problem behaviors, implementing the students' individualized education plans, and collaborating with their colleagues to make necessary accommodations. If these steps were to occur and general education teachers' attitudes towards including students with autism and EBD improved, then the students would have more opportunities to learn with their typically developing peers. The students would also be more likely to be placed in a less restrictive environment, according to the continuum of services outlined in the Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act of 2004.

### **Limitations**

Although the information gained from the study is valuable, there are some limitations that should be taken into consideration when examining the results. One limitation to the study was that only 25 participants were included in the sample. More general education teachers should have been surveyed to obtain more accurate results regarding their attitudes toward including students with disabilities. However, having 25 participants is acceptable due to the fact that this was a pilot study. Another limitation was that participants were contacted using a snowball sampling method. The

researcher asked participants to complete the surveys and identify others to become members of the sample instead of following strict randomization procedures. Using another method such as probabilistic, systematic, or stratified sampling would have resulted in acquiring a sample that better represented the population being examined. Recognizing these limitations offers important implications for future researchers.

### **Recommendations for Future Research**

Future research should continue to evaluate general educators' attitudes toward the inclusion of students with disabilities. Variables such as age, years of teaching, and previous experience with special education should be studied in order to discover what factors lead to accepting environments for students with special needs. Teachers' attitudes toward inclusion need to be evaluated before and after participating in various training sessions that explains special needs students' behaviors and offers strategies to accommodate their needs in the classroom. Researchers would then be able to identify the information that is most valuable for educators to know when dealing with students with disabilities. As a result, future programs would be more helpful for professionals and would better prepare them to manage these students with their typically developing peers. This study should also be duplicated using a larger sample size of participants who have been selected using a more randomized procedure to acquire more accurate results. Completing this research would further advance the knowledge of professionals involved in the field of special education.

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## Appendices